

Chapter

Stewardship and Woodland Planning

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Having a management plan is important to achieving your goals for your property. You might be thinking “Why would I want to manage my property at all?” especially if you bought it as a weekend or vacation retreat. Nevertheless, there are many reasons to consider some level of active management on your property. Management can enhance many of the values you’re interested in, including wildlife, woodland health, fire protection, and property values.

Through a series of short exercises, this chapter will help you:

- Discover what you value most about your property
- Figure out its highest values or uses
- Develop a simple stewardship plan
- Achieve your objectives in ways that do not impair your ability, your neighbor’s ability, or future generations’ ability to enjoy and benefit from the property

No matter what you want to do with your property, you’ll need a plan that matches your ecological, economic, and cultural values. This is called a *stewardship plan*. Here are some aspects to consider in developing your plan.

Property values

Property values generally means economic worth, but this guide expands the definition to include intrinsic value.

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions. If you’re sharing the land with your family or partners, it’s a good idea to get their answers to these questions, too.

Why do you have this land?

What do you like about it?

How does it feel to you? How do you feel when you’re on your property? What words describe the feelings you have for this land?

What legacy would you like to leave for future generations?

Defining your property

Knowing what's on your property (making an inventory) is one of the first important steps in managing your property. One way to inventory is to sketch a map of your property and what is on it. The sketch should include property boundaries and should identify special places—pond, trails, roads, fences, buildings—and their position in relationship to one another.

Your sketch map also should include the types of trees and forests on your property as well as any nonforested areas, such as meadows. For example, you might identify a 4-acre alder patch, a dense stand of Douglas-fir trees, and a young group of ponderosa pine. Also, note any problems you see such as browsed seedlings, presence of insects or disease, steep slopes, or wet areas that might limit access. Systematically, walk through your property and look carefully at what you see and then jot down a description. For example:

- NE corner (\pm 2 acres): Brush pile, scrubby-looking brush under some trees that are growing well.
- SE (half acre): low and marshy with a muddy road cutting through it; lots of animal tracks.
- NW (3+ acres): Highest land, nice views.

- SW (# of acres?): Gentle slope to SE. Good mix of healthy-looking trees; not much underbrush. Quite a few acres of trees on neighbor's side of the fence too.

As you write this information, you also can sketch the different areas on a map. Each separate area you identify can be as small as a half acre or as large as 10 or 20 acres. You decide. The smaller your property, the more detailed you can be, and the smaller the areas you can identify and sketch in your map.

To create a map, start with a photocopy of the plot map for your property, available from your county assessor's office. Enlarge the map to a size that's easy to work with and begin outlining and sketching the different areas.

If you can't get a map from the assessor, you can use the graph paper in the sleeve at the end of this chapter. You will need to decide which scale to use for your map (such as 1 inch equals 50 feet). Figure 1.1 shows a sample sketch map and gives brief descriptions for each area on the map. Write descriptions for your own map in column 1 of the blank form "Creating a Stewardship Plan—Worksheet," which is in the sleeve at the end of this chapter.

As you make your map, also look at what's on the other side of your fences and property lines. Your neighbors' properties certainly can affect you, so sketch in significant aspects such as pastures or forestland bordering yours. If you are not sure where your property lines are, you might want to ask your neighbor(s). The best way to find out, however, is to have the property line(s) surveyed by a qualified surveyor (see Chapter 12).

Area 1 — A 9-acre area that was once an old field. Trees have seeded in over time and range in height from 1 to 25 feet. Trees are somewhat clumpy. Deer like to feed here. Our cabin is along the road that enters the property through this area. A creek that flows during the wet months borders this area.

Area 2 — A 13-acre alder forest. The trees are between 20 and 25 years old. Trees are small, only 6 inches in diameter. The understory is almost pure swordfern.

Area 3 — An 8-acre area with Douglas-fir trees about 40 to 50 years old. The stand is very dense. Trees are small, about 9 inches in diameter. They appear to be growing slowly and are not very healthy.

Area 4 — A 10-acre area. The former property owners planted it 10 years ago, but it appears few trees survived. Some of the trees are 15 feet tall and are somewhat groupy. There is a fair amount of grass and, in some places, a lot of shrubs and maple sprouts. Deer have badly browsed some trees.

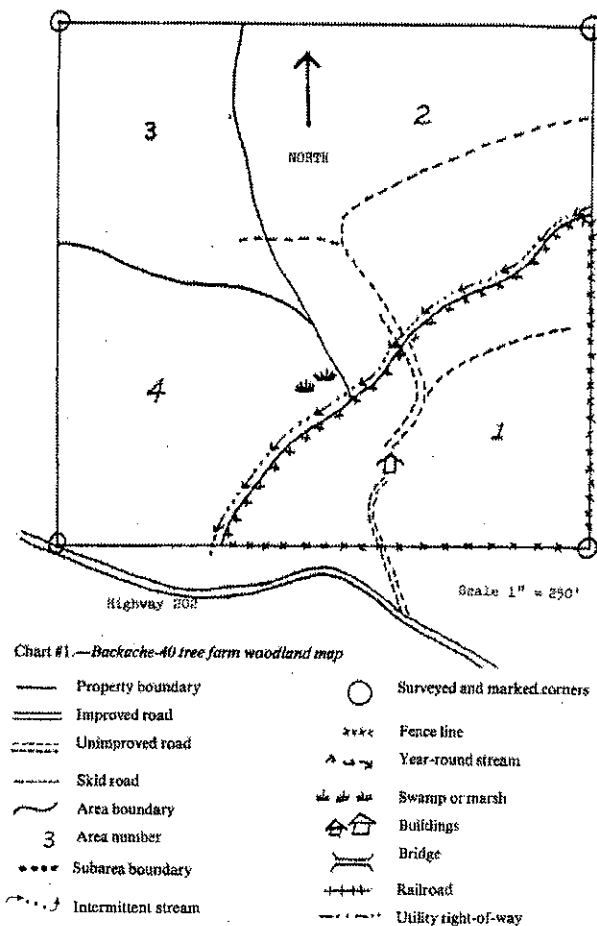


Figure 1.1—A sample sketch map of rural property, with brief descriptions of each area mapped.

Creating a vision for your property*

In an ideal world, what do you envision happening on your woodland? More specifically, what do you want the areas on your map to look like in the future? Do you want to have big trees? Do you want to have openings in your woodland for wildlife? Do you want to create

a pond in that wet area? Are you going to retire there? Do you plan to build on your property? If you're unsure of your woodland's potential, you might ask a forester or a wildlife biologist to visit and give you some ideas and advice.

Some common reasons that woodland owners manage their property are listed below. Some require more effort (management) to achieve than others. Check the ones you'd like to explore further. Remember, whatever combination of objectives you choose, you'll be managing the land for sustainability and as an environmental steward.

*Adapted from *Country Acres: A Guide to Buying and Managing Rural Property*. Lowell Klessig and Mike Kroenke. 1999. University of Wisconsin Extension Service.

- Natural beauty** Most urban dwellers who buy rural property do it for the natural beauty of the area. It's important to identify what you mean by "natural beauty." Is it the pattern of light in a forest? The sound of wind in the trees? The shapes of the rocks? The creek that runs through the property? The animals that use the property? The color of the trees?
- Outdoor recreation** Perhaps playing outdoors is what led you to own rural property. Do you hike, fish, hunt with gun or camera, swim, pick berries, watch birds, cross-country ski, or snowmobile at your place?
- Wildlife enhancement** For most people, wildlife is integral to the rural experience. Every land-use decision you make affects wildlife. As a good steward, your management plan may include strategies for minimizing impacts on wildlife. In fact, you can take positive steps to enhance wildlife habitat (see Chapter 9). Do you want to manage for many different kinds of wildlife as possible (species richness) or for certain ones such as pheasant, ducks, or woodpeckers? Can you team up with your neighbors to create *wildlife corridors*? Also, you'll need to choose whether you want to attempt to reduce non-native animal or plant species. Remember: Every property can be managed to enhance its natural capacities, but each has limits on the wildlife species it can support.
- Retreat** Is your property mainly a place to get away from it all?
- Other** List any other noneconomic uses of your property.

You might think that you won't have to actually "manage" your property for these noneconomic values, that you can just enjoy the property and the values

you seek will happen on their own. That may be true for a short time, but plants and forests grow and change over time in a process called *plant succession* (see Chapter 2). Brush will fill in the trails. Trees will invade your favorite berry-picking spots or obscure your favorite views. Your trees may become too dense and therefore susceptible to insects. The pond may overflow or dry up. You'll soon find out that having woodland property takes a lot of work and management.

Now let's look at some economic uses for your property.

- Real estate investment** Do you plan to sell your land at some point? Pay attention to taxes and cost-sharing and assistance programs. Check out forestland regulations. What can you do to enhance your property's resale value?
- Sale of forest products** Timber and firewood are the first things people usually consider (see Chapter 8). Because of the value of sawtimber, particularly in western Oregon, the value of your trees may be substantial. Thinning your woodland, for example, not only enhances the health of remaining trees, it also can provide income from the harvested trees. Or, perhaps, you're interested in running a small portable sawmill to produce your own lumber from the trees harvested on your property? Consider harvesting other "forest products" such as Christmas trees, mushrooms, ferns, and boughs and branches for florists.

- Selling the rural experience** Are you interested in sharing the rural experience—for a price? Consider small-scale recreation enterprises such as hunting, primitive camping, hiking, birdwatching, nature photography, and wildflowers. Or, perhaps

(continued on page 8)

Ecosystem Management: Opportunities and Implications for Woodland Owners, EC 1469. Max Bennett. 1996. Corvallis: Oregon State University Extension Service, 12 pp. \$1.25

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Many OSU Extension publications also are on the Web at eesc.orst.edu. Click on "Publications and Videos."

Videos

Management Planning for Your Small Woodland, 1017 VT. Mike Bondi and Jeff Hino. 1995. Corvallis: Oregon State University, Forestry Media Center, 19 minutes. \$95.00 (purchase); \$25.00 (5-day rental).

Help for Your Woodland, 971 VT. Rick Fletcher. 1992. Corvallis: Oregon State University, Forestry Media Center, 20 minutes. \$95.00 (purchase); \$25.00 (5-day rental).

Videos available from:

Forestry Media Center, College of Forestry, Oregon State University, 250 Peavy Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331-5702.

Internet

Woodscaping Your Woodlands, AG 584. Robert Bardon. 1998. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service. Download from the Web at www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/forest_resources/desktop/woodscaping/. Then, click on Publication AG 584, *Woodscaping Your Woodlands*.

